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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000228

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SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: READOUT ON MID-FEBRUARY NATO
INTERNATIONAL STAFF MEETINGS

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse per 1.4 (b,d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: According to a readout provided to resident NATO Ambassadors of a visit to Azerbaijan by representatives of the NATO international staff for the week of February 12, 2007, their outlook for Azerbaijan was much more positive than previously. This would be reflected in their assessment that would be completed in early May 2007. The NATO staff will begin working with the Azerbaijani side to formulate the next Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), which is valid for two years and was due to be updated this year. There were also criticisms, mostly toward the Ministry of Defense and for the GOAJ's lack of understanding that the IPAP process should be a vehicle of reform. END SUMMARY.

NEW, MORE DEMANDING IPAP

12. (C) The NATO staff told the Ambassadors that Azerbaijan's new IPAP will need to be more demanding and will have to get away from the general nature of the current IPAP. They hoped that it would be a "national roadmap" for Azerbaijani ministers. There still seems to be little understanding amongst most ministers about what NATO means for Azerbaijan and what role they have to play in the IPAP process, but there is a sense among most of the relevant ministries that it is important to push forward on this goal nonetheless. The staff was somewhat disappointed however that the IPAP process was not seen as a "reform vehicle" for Azerbaijan and that there remains little ownership of the IPAP in the government. They were also critical that the IPAP process has not been integrated with other reform goals with other international bodies, such as the Council of Europe.

SLIGHT CHANGE OF ATTITUDE AT MOD

13. The staff said that they noticed a distinct change in the Ministry of Defense, and particularly with International Relations director General Ramiz Najafov. Formerly, Najafov had been a major obstructionist in implementing the military side of Azerbaijan's IPAP goals, but during this visit he seemed more flexible. The staff opined that this was the result of dictates from above. Despite these positive steps, there have been no moves toward democratic control of the armed forces and the MoD told the staff not to expect civilian control of the military before 2008. The staff further complained that the entire IPAP process on the MoD side is in the hands of a person who does not seem to have a

genuine desire to see closer relations between Azerbaijan and NATO, i.e. Najafov.

¶4. (C) The staff praised the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their public diplomacy efforts in regard to NATO. They also said that the Ministry of National Security was planning to send an MNS rep to NATO headquarters to meet the "intelligence sharing" portion of the IPAP. As reported SEPTEL, the MNS is in the final stages of negotiations with NATO to open an anti-terrorism center in Azerbaijan.

¶5. (C) The staff informed the MoD that the time will soon come when it will be inappropriate for the GOAJ to ask for NATO financial assistance. They gave the example of Bulgaria, which has a smaller state budget than Azerbaijan but does not ask for any NATO financial assistance. The GOAJ provided the staff with reasons as to why funding should continue, most based on regional circumstances.

¶6. (C) The MoD, characteristically, continued to make bellicose statements about Nagorno-Karabakh, threatening that if the situation did not change that "other measures would have to be considered." In regard to the CFE treaty, the Azeris admitted that they may be over on "heavy equipment", but that they would be back in line with CFE once the old equipment was removed/destroyed. They were quick to point out Armenian violations of CFE and the transfer of Russian military equipment from Georgia to Armenia.

¶7. (C) The MoD has agreed to bring all of their military forces to NATO standards. However, there still seems to be a disconnect between the MoD's understanding of what a NATO "standard" unit is. The MoD views this process as being far along vis--vis the Army and will begin bringing the Navy and

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Air Force up to NATO standards. Najafov said that it was likely that as a result of this that Azerbaijan would be able to participate in more NATO operations. The staff reminded the MoD that a unit does not meet "NATO standards" simply because they say that they do.

SMALL, POSITIVE STEPS ON THE INTERAGENCY PROCESS

¶8. (C) The GOAJ has set aside \$1.5 million USD in the state budget (earmarked at the Ministry of Finance) for NATO IPAP issues. The money will be used for reform projects and to foster an interagency process. The staff was pleased to see this measure, but noted that this was only a fraction of the funding that was needed.

¶9. (C) The staff noted that many of the IPAP deadlines have slipped, most notably in regard to the National Security Concept paper. It is difficult for the relevant ministries to move forward reforming themselves and aligning themselves with NATO without having this document available. The staff noted that parliament in Azerbaijan was essentially irrelevant and had little substantive role to play in the implementing reform or the IPAP process. The staff will encourage the GOAJ to make the next draft of the IPAP public.
DERSE